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Rhode Island a gold mine for study of graphic design

PS 10/16 D-1
■ Programs can be found at many area colleges, and a number of well-known designers have established their businesses in the state.

By ELAINE LEMBO
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

Gutenberg could never have imagined it.

A pamphlet about breast cancer.

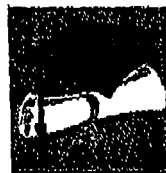
A brochure on AIDS. The sporting symbols for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

All are visual images, and each, in its own way, represents a breadth of careers in the world of graphic arts and design, from the methodology applied to the message to the technical printing process and paper quality of the final product.

As communication evolves from

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EDUCATION



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Design

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the movable type of the 15th century into the computer and information superhighway traffic jams of the 21st, the role of the person who can drive home the messages in a clear yet sophisticated and captivating manner is a critical, and often, lucrative one.

"Obviously our world is permeated with graphic images," says Hans van Dijk, head of the graphic design department at the Rhode Island School of Design. "More and more corporations and institutions have come to understand that the visual form of the message — either typography or images or some combination — has to have a good quality. There's so much 'stuff' being produced in the world that there's a definite need for well-trained designers."

Student appeal

The opportunity to parlay creative talent into solid careers makes graphic fields an attractive pursuit. The actual jobs graduates in graphic arts and design are moving into are quite diverse, yet they share the common goal of effective communication. "In our society, communication is central," says a spokeswoman at the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) in New York City. "As we shift from manufacturing to a service economy, communication has become much more dominant."

At RISD, the graphic design department opened in 1960. In 1975, the graduate-level program was added, and in 1989, the professional, five-year degree program. The department now has 205 students, with 188 undergraduates, totals that are easily double those of the early 1970s, according to van Dijk.

"It's a viable industry and a creative endeavor which you can make a good living at," van Dijk says. "Students see it as a way to synthesize their interests of a creative lifestyle, where they're dealing with aspects of art, making things clear to people in a visual means, with a very interesting way of living that is well-paid and challenging. Every project brings a new problem — rarely are things the same."

Positions range from the conceptual to the technical. They include art directors in design studios; interface design positions involving making the information of the computer screen easier to use; the more traditional positions creating graphic design of brochures, catalogs, logos, posters, signs and print advertisements, and typography design, among others.

Technical positions and those related to printing and production include desktop publishing, advertising layout at newspapers; pre-press jobs, preflight engineer (also called technical service representative, someone who examines computer disks to ensure they are error-free before a press run); color scanner, process photographer or press person.

"The jobs require electronic publishing skills," explains Prof. Lenore D. Collins of the industrial technology department at Rhode Island College. A more computerized printing industry has eliminated much of the manual work of earlier decades, says Collins, who is in charge of the graphic communications technology concentration at RIC and who helps graphic design students in the RIC art department understand the roles of production and printing in the graphics process.

"Charting growth according to courses and sections," Collins says, "I've had twice as many sections in the last four years. Classes are always full."

"Look around you," she says. "We cannot survive without printing. Think of yourself waking up and looking around. Tell me all the things you see that are printed — on sheets, walls, clocks, pajamas, cereal packages. Toothpaste boxes. It's everywhere. It's a big part of our life and people don't realize printing is the third-largest industry in the United States."

Yet one cannot mistake the role of the computer in graphic design. "People are in love with the computer and being romanced by it, but ultimately it's not romantic. It's a lot of hard hours and a lot of hard work," says Prof. Sharon E. DeLucca of the graphic design program at Roger Williams University. "And the computer isn't the mind, the designer is. My students quickly realize they're not going to be wooed by a beautiful thing but a de-

manding machine. You have to tell it exactly what to do and when. . . . Training about concept is the only way you can train. The mind is the best tool — not the computer. If you don't train students' minds, and just train them in computers, you haven't trained them."

Graphic arts in R.I.

Options close to home make this the ideal state for study and work in the field. "Rhode Island is in a great position in the graphic design industry," says a spokeswoman of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. "You've got RIC, RISD and Brown's art department. You've got great people who've settled there and a lot is going on."

Typically, firms can be as small as free-lancers who work out of the home to those who work out of departments in manufacturing and industry. "The work place can be large or small, from offices with 2 to 4 people, 8 to 12, to very large, 50 or 60," van Dijk says. "The largest firms often work for Fortune 500 companies, major industrial or manufacturing firms. Free-lancing gives the option of creating your own lifestyle and work environment. It's attractive."

The well-known leaders like Malcolm Grear Designers of Providence, creators of the visual theme for the Atlanta Olympics, scratch the surface of the list. A lone eagle is Peter Alf Anderson, who runs his business, Launch Pad, from his home in Providence. Richard Saul Wurman, who is the founder of the format for Access Guides for nearly every major U.S. city and international cities like London, Paris and Rome, runs an office of five people in Newport. He now runs the annual California TED conferences, a meeting dealing with the convergence of technology, entertainment and design.

Of his work at Launch Pad, Anderson says, "For me right now it's great. I set my own schedule. The clients I have, for the most part, are long-term projects. I can think about them for a long time. I'd rather not be forced to execute solutions in a day. But there's a real high cost associated with that. You must keep the clients coming in. In this type of industry you really have to romance the client on your own and keep a trust relationship going. It's key to having people come back to you."

Grear's firm designs college textbooks, publications for the Guggenheim and Metropolitan Museum of Art, signage systems and identities for corporations and hospitals, among other clients. "I think it's the best profession one can be in," he says. "I might disagree with other viewpoints, but I think graphic design is really a profession in the arts. It connects to the arts. It's often confused with commercial art."

"Graphic design is more consultation. Graphic designers don't make tangible products. They're dealing with ideas and should be able to project things into the future. We don't make pictures to hang on a wall like fine artists."

"We're dealing more with timeless ideas. We're not dealing with things that move in and out of vogue. We believe design is a language and we think we're communicating with people."

"I think design is going to become more important," says Grear, who maintains a full teaching load at RISD, where he headed the graphic design department in the 1980s. "We're about purposeful communication, and communication is lack-

ARTS. DESIGN PROGRAMS

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE: Bachelor of science degree in industrial technology with graphic arts concentration; master of science degree in industrial technology, graphic arts concentration. Contact Lenore Collins, assistant professor, industrial technology, 456-8703, 456-8009.

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN: Graphic design department. Four-year bachelor of fine arts degree; five-year professional bachelor of graphic design degree; master of fine arts degree. Contact Hans van Dijk, department head, 454-6171, Ext. 6176.

BROWN UNIVERSITY: Bachelor degree with interdisciplinary courses in visual arts and computer science. Contact visual arts department at 863-2423 or the multimedia laboratory through Anne Morgan Spahr, 863-7615.

ROGER WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY: Bachelor of arts degree in the College of Arts and Sciences with a concentration in graphic design. Contact professor Sharon E. DeLuca, graphic design, 254-3441.

SALVE REGINA UNIVERSITY: Bachelor of arts degree with concentration in graphic design. Dan Ludwig, chairman, art department, 847-8650, Ext. 3202.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF RHODE ISLAND: Two-year fine arts degree program with concentration in the two-dimensional form, day and evening classes. Contact art professor Tom Morrissey, 273-1234.

OTHER CONTACTS: American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), 164 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y., 10010, 212-807-1990; 800-548-1634; fax, 212-807-1799. Annual student membership, \$40.

Journal-Bulletin

ing on so many levels."

Finding a niche

The student contemplating study in graphic arts and design may wish to get a copy of Grear's *Inside/Outside*, which has been praised in the field and beyond for its portrayal of the discipline.

Or students may consult the 1994 edition of *Graphic Design: A Career*

Guide and Education Directory, edited by Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl and published by the AIGA Press. (Find it at the RISD store and Barnes and Noble.)

It answers a lot of questions and helps clear up some confusing terminology. "Graphic arts and graphic design are two different things — period," says the AIGA spokeswoman. "Graphic design grew out of graphic arts, and the AIGA is an organization of 8,500 graphic designers. The two disciplines hold hands but they're not the same thing."

"The printer is not a designer. Those jobs got sorted out in an industrialized society. Gutenberg did both, but as people got more and more focused on doing one thing well, some people became designers and some became printers."

The book "answers that question specifically," she says. "It breaks graphic design down into manageable chunks."

Chapters answer other questions, like: What is graphic design? What does a graphic designer need to know? Who becomes one? What goes on in design school? How do graphic design programs differ? How does one select a design school?

Other chapters tell how to find your first job, give commentary from graphic designers at work and discuss the future of the industry, and there is a directory of every school in the United States which teaches design and related courses, according to answers AIGA received in a survey of design schools.